

Research Article

Partition as Political Choice: Rajendra Prasad's Intellectual Critique of the Two Nations Theory and the Viability of Secular Multinational India

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Abstract

This study examines Dr. Rajendra Prasad's *India Divided* (1946) as a comprehensive intellectual critique of India's partition and the Two-Nation Theory that justified it. Through close textual analysis of Prasad's primary text combined with historiographical examination of partition scholarship, secondary academic sources, and political theory frameworks, this article employs critical discourse analysis and comparative historical methods to situate Prasad's arguments within postcolonial and contemporary political theory contexts. The analysis, grounded primarily in *India Divided* as the core source text, supplemented by examination of contemporary political documents (including the Lahore Resolution and statements by key figures like Jinnah, Ambedkar, and Congress leaders), demonstrates three primary dimensions of Prasad's critique. First, through historical textual evidence, Prasad systematically refutes the Two-Nation Theory by documenting centuries of Hindu–Muslim coexistence and cultural synthesis, arguing that communal antagonism was not primordial but rather artificially hardened through British colonial administrative strategies, particularly separate electoral systems that institutionalised religious identity as the fundamental category of politics. Second, meticulous textual analysis of the Lahore Resolution reveals deliberate ambiguities that enabled escalating territorial demands and necessitated the eventual partition of provinces like Punjab and Bengal, demonstrating how these boundary questions would inevitably multiply rather than resolve minority-protection dilemmas in both successor states. Third, drawing on economic data and statistical analysis from the 1940s, Prasad's prescient economic assessment documents how partition would disrupt integrated agrarian and industrial systems, severing complementary economic relationships—including the jute industry, cotton production, and railway networks—creating structural deficits that would handicap Pakistan's development. The findings, corroborated by scholarly consensus in peer-reviewed historical studies and political science analyses (such as works by Ayesha Jalal, Benedict Anderson, Will Kymlicka, and Arend Lijphart), demonstrate that Prasad articulates a compelling alternative governance framework: a secular, multinational constitutional design guaranteeing cultural autonomy and power-sharing mechanisms while preserving political unity. This article concludes that Prasad's analysis not only predicted partition's costs with remarkable accuracy—as validated by subsequent historical developments documented in post-1947 scholarship—but also advances a theoretically robust and practically durable governance model applicable to plural societies beyond the South Asian context.

Keywords

Partition, Two Nations Theory, Communal Relations, Colonial Administration, Multinational State Governance, Minority Protection

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1. Introduction

The partition of British India in 1947 was justified by proponents through the “Two-Nation Theory,” which claimed that Hindus and Muslims comprised inherently separate, incompatible nations that could not coexist within a single state [9]. Rajendra Prasad’s book *India Divided* (1946) offered a comprehensive rebuttal of this theory at the moment of its political ascendance. Writing from prison in 1945–46 as a senior Congress leader, Prasad dissected the historical, political, and economic assumptions behind the demand for Pakistan and argued that partition was a choice—not an inevitability—driven by specific political interests rather than any “primordial” incompatibility between communities. His critique challenged the portrayal of Hindus and Muslims as permanently antagonistic “imagined communities” [3] and instead documented centuries of cultural coexistence, thereby contesting the communal nationalist narrative constructed by the All-India Muslim League under Muhammad Ali Jinnah.

This paper examines Prasad’s intellectual critique of partition in detail, situating it within both the historiography of India’s division and broader political theory. The analysis underscores how Prasad attributed the rise of communal separatism to colonial policies (the “divide and rule” electoral engineering) and to elite political mobilization, rather than to ancient religious hatreds. It also evaluates Prasad’s assessment of the Lahore Resolution’s ambiguities, his economic forecasts regarding an unviable Pakistan, and his alternative proposal for a secular multinational Indian state that would guarantee cultural autonomy without political dismemberment. By doing so, the study addresses a notable gap: while Partition has been extensively studied by historians, Prasad’s contemporaneous critique has received comparatively little scholarly attention. Understanding his perspective enriches our view of Partition as a political choice made amid contingent historical circumstances, and highlights a road not taken toward a pluralistic democracy.

2. Literature Review

Partition historiography is vast, encompassing participant accounts, official narratives, and scholarly analyses that have evolved. In the immediate aftermath of 1947, several political figures documented their perspectives: for instance, B. R. Ambedkar’s *Pakistan or the Partition of India* (first published 1940, rev. ed. 1946) provided a detailed analysis of the Pakistan demand, in which Ambedkar, though critical of Muslim League politics, ultimately concluded that Partition might be a necessary solution to communal deadlock [2]. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad’s memoir *India Wins Freedom* (1959) later offered a poignant insider critique of Congress’s acceptance of Partition, expressing regret that more was not done to prevent the subcontinent’s division [4]. These ac-

counts, alongside works by figures like H. V. Hodson and Larry Collins & Dominique Lapierre, long formed the foundational narrative of Partition as a high-level political drama.

Academic historiography since the 1960s has debated the causes and inevitability of Partition. Nationalist historians traditionally emphasized British “divide and rule” policies and the role of colonial authorities in fomenting Hindu–Muslim division [8]. In contrast, the “revisionist” perspective, epitomized by Ayesha Jalal’s *The Sole Spokesman* (1985), argued that Jinnah’s demand for Pakistan was initially a bargaining position for greater Muslim autonomy rather than an unequivocal goal of full separation – an interpretation that highlights the contingency and ambiguity in the Partition debates [8]. Other scholars have focused on the communal violence and human tragedies of Partition, inaugurating a “people’s history” approach [6, 16] that shifts attention from political elites to the grassroots impact. Meanwhile, post-colonial theorists like Partha Chatterjee (1993) have examined how the Indian national movement negotiated questions of identity and community, though without explicitly focusing on alternative visions to the nation-state paradigm in 1947 [7].

Within this rich literature, however, relatively little has been written about in-depth intellectual critiques of the Partition proposal coming from the Indian National Congress camp itself, beyond general reflections by leaders like Gandhi or Nehru. Rajendra Prasad’s *India Divided* stands out as a singular book-length refutation of the Two-Nation Theory by a top Congress leader, yet it has often been treated as a historical footnote rather than a subject of scholarly analysis in its own right. Existing partition histories seldom engage with Prasad’s arguments at length; they tend to focus instead on the decisions of Mountbatten and the Congress Working Committee, the politics of Jinnah and the Muslim League, or the British constitutional negotiations. This article contributes to filling that gap by closely examining *India Divided* and positioning Prasad’s ideas in conversation with both the historiography and modern political theory. In doing so, it highlights why Prasad’s perspective matters: it not only predicted many of Partition’s adverse consequences but also articulated a plausible alternative vision of a multiethnic democracy. Understanding his critique enriches our appreciation of Partition as a political choice and provides lessons for contemporary debates on nationalism, minority rights, and state-building in plural societies.

3. Theoretical Framework

Prasad’s analysis and arguments can be fruitfully examined through several key political theories concerning nations, diversity, and state structure. First, Benedict Anderson’s (1983) concept of “imagined communities” is relevant

to understanding the Two-Nation Theory. Anderson argues that nations are socially constructed communities, imagined into existence through shared narratives, rather than primordial, eternal units. The Two-Nation Theory was an attempt to imagine South Asian Muslims and Hindus as two separate nationhoods defined by religion. Prasad's refutation implicitly aligns with Anderson's view: by demonstrating the historical fluidity and intermixing of Hindu-Muslim identities, Prasad challenges the notion that these communities naturally constitute separate nations. In essence, he contests the communalists' imagined community with an alternative imagination of an inclusive Indian nation.

Second, Prasad's proposed solution of a "unified secular state with cultural autonomy for different communities" can be contextualized by theories of multiculturalism and multinational citizenship. Political philosopher Will Kymlicka (1995) argues that liberal democracies can accommodate multiple national or ethnic groups through group-differentiated rights and autonomous jurisdictions, thus allowing minority cultures to flourish within a single state [11]. Prasad's vision of India as a multinational state – where a strong central political union guarantees autonomy for various cultural-national groups – anticipates the kind of multicultural citizenship that Kymlicka and others advocate. His idea that cultural rights and local autonomy can prevent conflict speaks to the core of multicultural theory: the state need not be culturally homogenous, and indeed, granting institutional recognition to diversity can strengthen national unity rather than weaken it.

Third, the governance model implied by Prasad's framework resonates with consociational democracy theory, most prominently articulated by Arend Lijphart (1977). Consociationalism recommends power-sharing arrangements in plural societies, whereby major segments (ethnic or religious communities) each have a stake in governance through mechanisms like grand coalitions, cultural autonomy, proportional representation, and minority vetoes [12]. Prasad's comparative references to Switzerland and Belgium – both examples of successful power-sharing in multiethnic or multilingual states – indicate a consociational logic. His argument that India could remain united by ensuring representation and autonomy for Muslims (and other groups) parallels Lijphart's insight that deeply divided societies can achieve stability without partition if their political systems formally incorporate all significant groups in decision-making [12]. In a consociational arrangement, no single community can dominate to the permanent exclusion of others, mitigating the sense of insecurity that often drives separatist demands.

4. Methodology

This research employs a qualitative, historical methodology, centered on close textual analysis and discourse analysis of *India Divided* alongside a review of relevant historical documents and secondary scholarship. The core primary

source is Rajendra Prasad's *India Divided* (1946) itself; the text is analyzed to extract Prasad's key arguments, the evidence he marshals, and the rhetorical strategies he uses to counter the Two-Nation Theory. This involves a form of intellectual history and textual interpretation, reading Prasad's work both for its explicit content and its subtext in the political milieu of the 1940s. In addition, we situate Prasad's discourse within the broader historiographical context by examining how his claims correspond to or challenge other contemporary accounts (such as statements by Jinnah, Ambedkar's writings, and Congress leaders' speeches) and later historical analyses.

The study also integrates a comparative historical approach. Prasad himself drew comparative examples (e.g., Switzerland, Belgium) to support his arguments, and we extend this by briefly comparing the governance models he cited with his proposals for India. We consider how analogous multiethnic states have managed cultural diversity without partition, using existing political science analyses (e.g., Lijphart's studies) as supporting evidence. Furthermore, a critical discourse analysis lens is applied to understand how Prasad and his opponents (the Muslim League leadership) constructed the narrative of nationhood: this involves analyzing language (such as the phrasing of the Lahore Resolution) and identifying assumptions and ideological positions embedded in those texts.

Secondary sources, including peer-reviewed historical studies and political theory works (as outlined in the theoretical framework), are used to frame and corroborate the analysis. These sources provide scholarly consensus or contrasting interpretations on key issues (such as the causes of communalism or the evaluation of Partition's outcomes), which help in assessing the validity and originality of Prasad's arguments. All secondary information has been evaluated for academic reliability, and non-academic or polemical sources have been avoided in favor of peer-reviewed literature or primary historical records. By combining historiographical research with political theory and textual/discourse analysis, this methodology allows for a multidimensional understanding of *India Divided* and its significance.

5. Analysis

5.1. Prasad's Critique of the Two-nation Theory

Rajendra Prasad's central contention in *India Divided* was that the Two-Nation Theory lacked any genuine historical or sociological basis. The theory asserted that Hindus and Muslims constituted two fundamentally distinct nations, with irreconcilable religions, cultures, and "outlooks on life," and therefore could not live together under one government. Prasad systematically refuted this claim by documenting extensive evidence of Hindu-Muslim coexistence and cultural synthesis over centuries. He argues that the Two-Nation Theory "is as unsupported by history and facts of everyday life,

as by the opinion of distinguished and representative Muslims [17]". Here, Prasad notes that even many prominent Muslim leaders and intellectuals did not subscribe to the view that Hindus and Muslims were destined to be separate nations – a pointed reminder that the communalist narrative was contested within the Muslim community itself.

In contrast to communal ideologues who painted an image of eternal Hindu–Muslim hostility, Prasad highlights a historical reality of interdependence and shared society. His approach is empirical and meticulous: he chronicles how, before British rule, Indian communities often inhabited shared spaces and forged a composite culture. For example, Hindus and Muslims participated in each other's festivals, patronized each other's saints, and developed syncretic traditions in music, literature, art, and architecture. Prasad gives concrete illustrations, such as the medieval bhakti and sufi movements, which drew devotees across religious lines. He cites the figures of Kabir and Guru Nanak – poet-saints who were born into one religious milieu (Muslim and Hindu respectively) but whose teachings blended ideas from both faiths – as emblematic of an indigenous spirit of pluralism: "Kabir was a Muslim and Nanak a Hindu by birth and yet they are both the products of that fusion which was going on despite the official and political divergence [18]". The existence of these revered figures and their continued influence demonstrates that large sections of Indian society did not view Hinduism and Islam as mutually hostile civilizations; on the contrary, a shared cultural realm had long existed.

Prasad further argues that communal antagonism was neither constant nor widespread historically. Even during periods of religiously identified rule or conflict (for instance, he notes tensions in the era of Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni), everyday relations at the community level often remained amicable [17]. He emphasizes how social and economic life in villages and towns necessitated cooperation across religious boundaries: artisans, farmers, and traders of different faiths worked together and relied on each other. This social reality, according to Prasad, flatly contradicts the Two-Nation Theory's caricature of Hindus and Muslims as perpetually at odds. In effect, Prasad is reframing the narrative of Indian nationhood – instead of two separate imagined communities, he portrays one deeply intertwined community of communities. His use of historical evidence serves to deconstruct the Muslim League's communal ideology by showing it to be a modern political construction (akin to what Anderson (1983) would call a newly imagined identity) rather than a reflection of timeless facts on the ground.

It is important to note that Prasad's critique also involved challenging the logic of the Two-Nation Theory on intellectual and moral grounds. He questioned whether religion alone is a sound or sufficient basis for nationality. Many Muslim leaders in undivided India – including Congress allies like Maulana Azad – had likewise argued that Indian Muslims were part of a broader Indian nation. Prasad aligns with this view, suggesting that religious identity, by itself,

did not determine political nationhood. By emphasizing shared languages, regional cultures, and economic ties that cut across religious lines, Prasad undermines the notion that religious difference must translate into separate national destinies. In contemporary theoretical terms, he was advocating for a civic conception of nationhood against an ethnic-religious conception: citizenship in a common Indian state could accommodate multiple religions, much as many modern nations encompass diverse ethnic or religious groups. This position directly challenges Jinnah's claim (made in his 1938 and 1940 addresses) that Hindus and Muslims could not form one nation. Prasad's alternative vision was an inclusive nationalism, whereby political unity and pluralistic identity could coexist.

5.2. Historical Development of Communal Tensions

Prasad contends that the stark communal polarization evident by the 1940s was a historically recent development, largely fostered by colonial policies and political mobilization. He meticulously traces how Hindu–Muslim relations, which had been broadly harmonious or at least non-antagonistic for long periods, were gradually reframed in oppositional terms under British rule. A key factor was the British strategy of "divide and rule," which introduced separate political representation for religious communities. Prasad highlights the Morley-Minto Reforms of 1909 (Indian Councils Act) that established separate electorates for Muslims, and subsequent extensions of this principle (to other groups in 1919, and the Communal Award of 1932 that entrenched separate electorates and reserved seats for multiple communities) as turning points [17]. These measures, though presented by the British as protections for minorities, institutionalized religious identity as the fundamental category of politics. In Prasad's analysis, what had once been fluid identities hardened into political blocs because colonial laws now rewarded communal solidarity with political power. Separate electorates meant that political candidates had to appeal exclusively to voters of their own religious community to win office. As Prasad observes, this arrangement "fundamentally transformed Hindu-Muslim relations by converting cultural and religious differences... into political divisions requiring organizational expression and ideological justification [17]".

Through a critical historical narrative, Prasad describes how each iteration of colonial constitutional reform deepened the wedge. The 1905 partition of Bengal (by Viceroy Curzon) is cited as an early attempt to create a Muslim-majority province and a Hindu-majority counterpart, sowing mistrust. The 1909 reforms then formalized communal electoral rolls; the 1919 Government of India Act expanded communal representation; and by the 1930s, communal considerations pervaded politics. Prasad's view aligns with the nationalist historiographical argument that British colonial governance engineered and exacerbated communal con-

sciousness as a counterweight to Indian nationalism [13]. Indeed, Prasad introduces the metaphor of the “communal triangle” to explain the dynamic: British authorities, Muslim League leaders, and Hindu communal organizations each became interlocking vertices that sustained communal politics [17]. The British patronage of separate identities enabled communal politicians; in turn, the rise of organizations like the Muslim League and Hindu Mahasabha provided the British with proof that Indians were divided, justifying continued imperial arbitration. Meanwhile, mainstream nationalists were gradually pushed into responding in communal terms, completing the triangle.

Prasad’s “communal triangle” analysis is particularly insightful. He argues that once separate electorates and reserved seats were in place, political competition inevitably took on a communal hue. Muslim leaders had to mobilize Muslims as Muslims, and similarly for Hindus, to win the allocated seats. For example, Prasad points to the outcomes of the 1945–46 provincial elections: the All-India Muslim League won about 90% of Muslim-designated seats, which Jinnah promptly cited as a mandate for Pakistan. Prasad counters that this supposed mandate was less a spontaneous upwelling of Muslim national sentiment than the product of the electoral system itself. Separate electorates ensured that the League faced no major Muslim rivals in those contests (Congress and others often did not contest Muslim seats), effectively manufacturing an impression of unanimity [9]. Prasad notes that the Muslim League’s dramatic electoral success thus “actually reflected the impact of separate electorates in crystallizing communal consciousness rather than demonstrating that Muslims inherently desired partition [17]”. The League’s claim to be the sole representative of Indian Muslims was a political construction – albeit a successful one – enabled by institutional design. This perspective is corroborated by modern historians who argue that the League’s dominance by 1946 was not inevitable: it emerged from specific political contexts and maneuvers [9, 10].

Alongside electoral politics, Prasad examines the escalation of communal violence in the 1940s as both symptom and catalyst of Partition. He provides a sobering account of events like the Great Calcutta Riot of August 1946, the massacres in Noakhali, and the chain of reprisal killings in Bihar and Punjab. Prasad asserts that these horrific incidents were not simply spontaneous eruptions of mass hatred, but were, in part, deliberately orchestrated or exploited by political actors advocating for Partition. The Muslim League’s call for “Direct Action” in August 1946 – which led to massive riots in Calcutta – is a prime example. Prasad and other critics alleged that elements of the League incited violence to strengthen their bargaining position by creating an atmosphere of such chaos and horror that British and Congress leaders would conclude that Hindus and Muslims must be separated [10]. In *India Divided*, Prasad documents how communal riots were used to “create the appearance that continued Hindu-Muslim coexistence had become impossi-

ble,” thereby turning public opinion and even Gandhi’s Congress colleagues toward the idea that Partition might be the lesser evil [17]. He argues that it became a self-fulfilling prophecy: once violence reached a certain pitch, many came to believe that the Two-Nation Theory was validated by events, even though, in Prasad’s view, the violence itself was the outcome of calculated communal propaganda and fear-mongering.

5.3. The Lahore Resolution and Its Ambiguities

The Lahore Resolution of March 23, 1940 (often dubbed the “Pakistan Resolution”) was a pivotal moment in crystallizing the demand for partition, and Prasad devotes considerable attention to analyzing its text and implications. Formally, the resolution – adopted at the Muslim League’s Lahore session under Muhammad Ali Jinnah’s leadership – called for “independent states” in the Muslim-majority “zones” of northwestern and eastern India, in which constituent units would be “autonomous and sovereign.” Notably, it did not explicitly use the name “Pakistan,” nor did it specify exactly which territories were being referred to, or whether one or two states were envisioned. This deliberate vagueness had significant political consequences. Historians like Jalal (1985) have argued that the ambiguity was strategic: by keeping the wording flexible (e.g., saying “states” in plural and speaking of loosely defined zones), Jinnah maintained room for negotiation – potentially accepting a looser federation rather than a full partition if better terms were offered. Prasad, writing in 1946, interpreted these ambiguities as both a tactical ploy and a dangerous flaw.

Prasad’s analysis of the Lahore Resolution is twofold. First, he applies a rigorous textual reading, insisting on the “natural meaning of the words” in the resolution [17]. By this reading, the resolution demands that all regions where Muslims are a majority should be grouped into independent sovereign entities. Prasad methodically examines which areas this would entail. In the North-Western Zone, it clearly would include the Punjab, North-West Frontier Province (NWFP), Sindh, and British Balochistan – contiguous areas with Muslim majorities [17]. However, even here, Prasad finds complexity: Punjab as a whole had a slim Muslim majority (~54%), but included districts like Amritsar with non-Muslim majorities and others like Gurdaspur with only a bare Muslim majority of 51%. If taken wholesale, an independent “Pakistan” encompassing all of Punjab would automatically place very large Hindu/Sikh minorities (nearly 45% in Amritsar, for example) under Muslim sovereignty. The Eastern Zone was even more problematic: it presumably referred to Bengal and possibly Assam. Bengal had a Muslim majority (~55% in 1940), but its western and some central districts were Hindu-majority, and the city of Calcutta was overwhelmingly Hindu. Assam had a Hindu majority overall, with only certain lower districts (e.g., Sylhet) having Muslim majorities. The resolution’s failure to name specific provinc-

es, using the term “zones” left it unclear whether all of Bengal and Punjab were to be in the proposed Muslim state (s), or whether those provinces might be partitioned internally to separate their Muslim-majority and Hindu-majority areas.

Prasad argues that the ambiguity of the Lahore Resolution was politically expedient but practically untenable. By not delineating boundaries, the League could rally support with the maximalist idea of a large Pakistan while deferring the messy details. But this opened the door to “escalating territorial demands” (as Prasad put it) – the League could claim entire provinces, while the Congress could insist on protecting substantial non-Muslim populations by dividing those provinces. Indeed, Prasad presciently noted that the vagueness “allowed the partition of Punjab and Bengal” to emerge as a solution, since ultimately there was no other way to reconcile the resolution’s call for Muslim-majority states with the demographic reality of mixed populations [2, 9]. This is exactly what happened in 1947: Punjab and Bengal each were split roughly along religious lines. Prasad’s critique here underscores that the Two-Nation Theory, when translated into a territorial formula, encountered insurmountable complexities because populations were not neatly separable. Any line drawn would create as many problems as it solved – a point he repeatedly emphasizes.

The second aspect of Prasad’s analysis concerns the minority issue within the proposed Pakistan. Ironically, the Lahore Resolution itself acknowledged that creating Muslim states would not eliminate minority concerns. It included a proviso: that “adequate, effective and mandatory safeguards” for the religious, cultural, economic, and political rights of minorities (particularly non-Muslims in the proposed Muslim zones) should be provided in the constitution of those states. Prasad seizes on this point: if safeguards are indeed required to protect minorities in Pakistan, then by the same logic, why would similar safeguards not suffice to protect Muslims (or other minorities) in a united India [17]? He essentially turns the League’s argument on its head by posing a fundamental question of principle: if two groups cannot live together without firm guarantees of rights, isn’t that true regardless of borders? Partition, in his view, would simply exchange one minority problem for another. As he succinctly puts it, partition “multiplied the minority problem rather than solving it” [17]. Once Pakistan was carved out, there would be large non-Muslim minorities inside it (Hindus and Sikhs in West Punjab and Sindh; Hindus in East Bengal), just as a sizable Muslim minority (nearly 35 million people) would remain in truncated India. Each new nation-state would then need minority protections akin to those that could have been provided in a unified state. For Prasad, this outcome was tragically ironic and entirely predictable – indeed, subsequent history proved him right, as both India and Pakistan struggled with their minority issues long after Partition.

5.4. Economic Viability of Partition

One of Prasad’s most prescient contributions in India Divided is his economic critique of Partition. He systematically examined whether the proposed division of India into two sovereign nations was economically feasible and beneficial, and his conclusions were emphatically negative. According to Prasad, partition would create impoverished, imbalanced states and “more new problems... than it will solve [17]”. He marshaled data on agriculture, industry, finance, and trade to argue that the regions earmarked for Pakistan lacked the infrastructure and resources to sustain themselves independently, while the truncation of India would disrupt the integrated economy of the subcontinent.

Prasad noted that the Muslim-majority areas were primarily agrarian and underdeveloped industrially. For example, what became West Pakistan (the Punjab, Sindh, NWFP, etc.) had vast agricultural output – Punjab was a grain basket – but very few manufacturing centers. Key industries like textiles, steel, machinery, and chemicals were concentrated in provinces that would remain in India (e.g., Bombay, Madras, Bengal’s industrial belt around Calcutta). Prasad cites figures to illustrate this disparity: in 1947, the territories constituting Pakistan had only a handful of industrial establishments and accounted for a tiny fraction of the subcontinent’s industrial production [17]. One estimate is that manufacturing constituted merely about 7–8% of what would be Pakistan’s GDP in the late 1940s, whereas the all-India average was much higher [8]. Pakistan would thus start with an industrial handicap – it would be a raw material producer reliant on imported manufactured goods. This, in turn, meant it would have limited capacity to earn foreign exchange or to develop economically without substantial capital investments. Prasad predicted acute financial and fiscal challenges for such a state.

Food security was another concern Prasad raised. He observed that East Bengal (to be East Pakistan) was rich in rice production, and West Punjab in wheat, yet the partition line could leave each side with deficits in certain staples or resources. Strikingly, he noted that at the very outset, Pakistan would struggle to feed itself despite its agricultural base. Contemporary data showed that in 1947, the regions forming Pakistan (with roughly 30 million people in West Pakistan and 35 million in East) were not self-sufficient in food and depended on imports [8]. Indeed, as Ishrat Husain (2004) later pointed out, Pakistan in 1947 “couldn’t feed itself and had to import all its food requirements from abroad” – a vulnerability that India, with its diversified agriculture, did not face to the same extent. Prasad anticipated this vulnerability, arguing that Partition was economically “impracticable” because it severed the complementary economic relationships developed under one administration [17]. India’s fertile food-producing regions, industrial centers, and port cities had operated as parts of a single economic unit; Partition meant each new country would lose access to crucial inputs or mar-

kets that were previously within one political boundary.

To illustrate the interdependence that Partition would disrupt, Prasad gave concrete examples, most famously the jute industry. Bengal was the world's largest jute producer; the cultivation of jute was concentrated in East Bengal (Muslim-majority areas like Narayanganj and Dhaka), whereas nearly all jute processing mills were around Calcutta in West Bengal (Hindu-majority). If Bengal were divided, jute growers and jute mills would be in different countries, crippling the industry. Prasad correctly foresaw that this would not only hurt both India (losing raw jute supply) and Pakistan (lacking mills to process its crop), but also cause upheaval in global markets. In fact, following Partition, East Pakistan's jute could not be easily processed, and a sharp spike in jute prices and dislocation in supply occurred until India developed its own cultivation and Pakistan built some mills [5]. Prasad argued that such outcomes were inevitable: "the boundaries separating West Bengal from East Pakistan" would sever "the jute-growing areas in East Pakistan from the jute mills in West Bengal," destroying an integrated value chain [17]. He made similar arguments about cotton and textiles – much of the cotton was grown in what would be West Pakistan (Sindh, southern Punjab), while the big textile mills were largely in Bombay and Ahmedabad in India. Partition would thus place producers and manufacturers in separate economies, forcing Pakistan to export raw cotton and import cloth at a higher cost, and India to scramble for new cotton sources. Tea was another example: Assam's tea plantations had traditionally shipped tea through the port of Chittagong, but after Partition, that port was in East Pakistan (present-day Bangladesh), compelling India to reroute through Calcutta or build new infrastructure at great expense.

Prasad further highlighted the disintegration of unified transportation and financial networks. The railway system, laid out to serve an undivided India, suddenly became bifurcated. Critical rail links and trade routes were cut, notably between eastern India and the northeast (Assam), which now had to detour around East Pakistan. He cited how the Assam–Bengal rail line was severed, isolating Assam from the Indian heartland [17]. The loss of Karachi – the busiest port in the west – to Pakistan meant Indian trade had to be redirected to Bombay, which struggled with congestion [17]. Banking and finance also faced rupture: most major banks were headquartered in Bombay or Calcutta, and Pakistan began essentially with a shortage of banking institutions and experienced financial personnel, complicating everything from revenue collection to international trade financing [1]. Prasad argued that such economic dislocations would not be temporary blips but structural handicaps that could stunt development for years. Indeed, the decades after 1947 saw Pakistan and India both grappling with these disruptions – validating Prasad's foresight that Partition would "aggravate economic problems" rather than alleviate them.

In Prasad's assessment, then, the Two-Nation Theory had paid scant attention to economic reality. Creating two states

out of one integrated economy was akin to performing major surgery on a living organism: the result, he warned, would be trauma and dysfunction. He predicted that Pakistan would face deficits in essential goods, lack industrial capital, and be forced into an unfavorable trading position. Meanwhile, India would lose valuable resources (for example, jute and cotton regions, as he quantified: Partition deprived India of "75% of its jute, 40% of its cotton, and a primary source of its wheat," requiring India to import commodities it once exported [15, 17]. Partition, Prasad wrote, would not solve the question of Hindu–Muslim well-being; it would "create more new problems...financial, economic, industrial and political...than it will solve [17]". This stark conclusion, rooted in extensive data and logical reasoning, was one of Prasad's strongest arguments. It shifted the debate from abstract issues of identity to concrete issues of livelihoods and state capacity.

History largely bore out Prasad's economic projections. The newly formed Pakistan struggled in its early years with fiscal crises, food shortages, and an imbalance between its agrarian base and industrial needs [1, 8]. India, while inheriting more infrastructure, had to undertake significant adjustments to re-link its economy without the territories it lost. Prasad's analysis thus stands as a remarkable example of foresight. It also reinforces a normative point: that political decisions like Partition should be evaluated not just on ideological grounds, but on pragmatic considerations of human welfare. By this measure, Prasad judged Partition as a lose-lose proposition, a view that underscores the tragic dimension of the choice made in 1947.

6. Discussion

The analysis of Rajendra Prasad's *India Divided* presented above demonstrates that Partition was not an inevitability dictated by ancient feuds, but a political choice shaped by specific historical and strategic factors. Situating Prasad's arguments within broader scholarly debates highlights several key insights. First, Prasad's work reinforces the understanding – aligned with Benedict Anderson's theory of imagined communities – that the stark Hindu–Muslim divide, which justified Partition, was a constructed narrative, not a timeless reality. Prasad effectively showed that Hindu and Muslim identities in South Asia had been far more fluid and overlapping before colonial interventions. This corresponds to Anderson's idea that nations (and by extension communal identities) are created through political imagination and storytelling [19]. The British Raj's census categorizations, electoral laws, and communal rhetoric imagined Hindus and Muslims as monolithic political blocs; the Muslim League further propagated this imagined separation through its Two-Nation rhetoric. Prasad's historical evidence debunked that narrative, reminding us that different imaginings of community – for example, an inclusive Indian national identity – were equally plausible. In today's scholarship, this serves as

a case study of how competing nationalisms (exclusive vs. inclusive) vie for dominance, and how the triumph of one narrative (the Two-Nation Theory) in 1947 owed much to contingent events and leadership choices rather than inexorable civilizational fissures.

Second, engaging with Prasad's alternative vision through the lens of political theory illustrates the normative and practical strength of his ideas. Prasad essentially anticipated modern frameworks of managing diversity, such as Kymlicka's multicultural citizenship and Lijphart's consociational democracy. In *India Divided*, Prasad argued for robust minority protections and shared governance; the subsequent Indian Constitution (1950) did incorporate some elements of this, like fundamental rights for religious freedom and cultural preservation, although the trauma of Partition also led India's founders to avoid formal power-sharing along religious lines. Pakistan's early struggle, on the other hand, validated Prasad's warning that creating a state ostensibly for one community would not eliminate minority issues – Pakistan soon faced its own internal ethnic and linguistic divides (Bengalis, Punjabis, Sindhis, etc., with the Bengali-majority East Pakistan eventually seceding to form Bangladesh in 1971). This outcome tragically underlined Prasad's contention that partition multiplies problems: the Bengali Muslims of East Pakistan found themselves a mistrusted minority within Pakistan, leading to conflict and a new partition. Had Prasad's approach of a pluralistic, united India been pursued, it is intriguing to consider whether the subcontinent might have been spared at least some of the bloodshed and disruption. While counterfactuals are uncertain, Prasad's ideas find support in later examples worldwide where negotiated autonomy and inclusive governance resolved secessionist conflicts (for instance, in Aceh, Indonesia, or in South Tyrol, Italy).

Third, Prasad's critique highlights the importance of political leadership and choice. One of the themes emerging from his work is that the division of India was not a foreordained clash of civilizations but the consequence of leaders and organizations (the British government, Jinnah and the League, and to a lesser degree the Congress) making certain decisions under pressure. This aligns with a strand of Partition historiography emphasizing contingency and agency [9]. Prasad was, in fact, appealing to his fellow Congress leaders in 1946–47 to hold firm against the idea of Pakistan and to consider power-sharing compromises instead. The eventual decision of Congress's high command to accept Partition (in June 1947) came after escalating violence convinced many, contrary to Prasad's stance, that separation was the only expedient solution. From a theoretical perspective, this underscores how perceptions and misperceptions during crises can override long-term reasoning. Prasad's voice was overwhelmed by the immediate imperative to stop civil war, illustrating a phenomenon noted by conflict scholars: once a narrative of irreconcilability takes hold and violence spirals, even well-founded alternatives lose political traction. His work then

stands as both a testament to an alternative path and a cautionary tale about missed opportunities for peace.

Additionally, when reflecting on Prasad's critique through a contemporary lens, it offers enduring lessons for plural societies. His insistence that "guaranteeing cultural autonomy within one state" is superior to "segmenting populations into separate states" resonates in ongoing debates about how to handle ethnic or religious divisions – whether in places like Iraq, Syria, Nigeria, or the Balkans. Modern scholars like John McGarry and Brendan O'Leary have often argued that power-sharing and federalism are preferable to partition as solutions to ethnic conflict, because partitions can cause massive displacement, create hostile successor states, and leave minorities stranded on either side of new borders [14]. Prasad's predictions about the consequences of India's partition – refugee flows, communal violence, persistent animosity, and militarization (he even foresaw problematic questions of defense and security arising from partition) – were vindicated by subsequent events, including the enduring India–Pakistan rivalry and multiple wars. Thus, Prasad's work enriches political theory by providing a real-world case where a democratic multinational solution was articulated as an alternative to separation. It challenges the notion that homogenizing states (through partition or expulsion) are easier or more stable; instead, it makes a strong argument that pluralistic cohabitation, though difficult, is both ethically and pragmatically superior in the long run.

7. Conclusion

Dr. Rajendra Prasad's *India Divided* stands as a compelling scholarly and moral testament against the partition of India. Through a detailed examination of historical patterns, political developments, and economic facts, Prasad demonstrated that the Two-Nation Theory – the intellectual foundation of Pakistan's creation – was deeply flawed. He showed that Hindu and Muslim communities had not been irreconcilable enemies through history, but had instead built a shared civilization, contradicting the communalist claim that two separate nations were preordained. He traced how British colonial engineering and communal politics in the first half of the 20th century manufactured a sense of division that was by no means inevitable. Analyzing the 1940 Lahore Resolution, Prasad exposed its vague and expedient nature, warning that its implementation would necessitate further partitions of provinces and leave minority populations in peril. His economic analysis predicted the very disruptions that Partition in fact brought about: fractured markets, resource imbalances, refugee crises, and strategic vulnerabilities. In virtually every respect, subsequent events validated Prasad's foresight – Partition did multiply minority problems, trigger violence and displacement on an unprecedented scale, and bequeath a legacy of antagonism between India and Pakistan that has proven intractable.

Yet, as Prasad fervently argued, another path was available.

He articulated a forward-looking framework for a united India that could accommodate its diverse peoples through constitutional guarantees and federal power-sharing. This alternative vision – of a secular, multinational state – was not only morally richer (in that it sought unity without hegemony, and peace without dismemberment) but also practically sound, drawing on successful examples and logical reasoning. It is one of history's tragic ironies that Prasad, who would become independent India's first President, had to preside over a nation whose partition he so eloquently opposed. The fact that his warnings went unheeded in the rush of events does not diminish their significance; on the contrary, it challenges us to learn from this episode. Partition was the product of human agency, misjudgment, and mistrust – not an unavoidable fate. Understanding Prasad's critique underscores that the 1947 split was contingent and that alternate solutions were on the table, however politically difficult they may have seemed.

Beyond its immediate historical context, Prasad's critique carries enduring relevance. It speaks to a fundamental question in political philosophy and international relations: how should multiethnic or multireligious societies organize themselves? Prasad's answer was clear – through inclusive democracy, not physical separation. In a world still rife with ethnic conflicts and secessionist movements, India Divided offers a prescient case for pluralistic integration. It reminds policymakers and citizens alike that drawing new borders is a fraught remedy that often exacerbates the very problems it aims to solve. Durable peace, Prasad contended, comes from addressing grievances and protecting rights within a common political framework. The wisdom of this approach can be seen in various success stories of pluralistic states, just as the perils of ignoring it can be seen in the aftermath of partitions and civil wars. Ultimately, Prasad's work challenges us to reject fatalistic narratives of civilizational clashes and instead embrace the hard work of building unity amidst diversity.

Author Contributions

Pranav Priy is the sole author. The author read and approved the final manuscript.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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